

Low Cuts With High Marks

The Flex™ 21 Greensmower

In any business, success often depends on the ability to adapt to new things. As customers' needs and expectations change, products must evolve along with them to accommodate new uses.

The Toro® Greensmaster® Flex™ 21 walking greensmower is an excellent example.

In recent years, the trend among most top golf courses has been to keep grass on putting greens much shorter. While that makes a faster putting surface, it also creates new challenges to maintain those greens in peak playing condition. The industry had to adapt.

Someone very familiar with this situation is Dr. Joseph Duich, Professor Emeritus of Agricultural Sciences at Penn State University. Since the 1950s, he's been a leading pioneer in modern turfgrass, and was instrumental in developing the most popular ultradwarf bentgrass varieties, such as Penn A1, A2 and A4.

"Not too many decades ago, people used to mow putting green grasses at a quarter of an inch," explains Dr. Duich. "That's 250/1000ths. Now they're mowing them less than 100/1000ths. The average is probably an 8th of an inch or lower."

Shorter Heights Need Better Equipment

"It takes a pretty good mower to cut those greens consistently," Dr. Duich continues. "That's why they (Toro) developed the Flex units—to be able to mow these grasses this close, especially on undulating greens, and not scalp them. That's where the Flex 21 comes in," he says.

"On an undulating green, a lot of mowers would scalp them with real low heights of cut," adds Duich. "Then you

get close to bare ground, which is very undesirable for the putting green." Toro investigated and answered these concerns with the introduction of the Flex 21 in 2001.

"Superintendents are continuously judged by the quality of their greens," says Helmut Ullrich, Marketing Manager for Toro Greensmaster products. "The Flex 21 was designed to support the agronomic demands of greens cut to 1/16 inch and the growing demands on today's superintendents who are expected to achieve that height."

The Flex 21 features a unique flexible cutting unit, specially designed for undulating greens and ultradwarf grasses. The innovative cutting unit flexes from side to side around the bedknife centerline, as well as forward and backward around the reel centerline. The flexible cutting mechanism is separate from the traction unit to further ensure crisp, tight mowing at the height you want, with less scalping than any other mower.



Photo by John and Jeannine Henebry

Tim Hiers, Golf Course Manager of The Old Collier Club in Naples Florida, has been using the Flex 21 on his undulating greens since construction with great success.

The Flex 21 consistently provides a superior close cut, even on the most challenging greens.

"It's definitely given me some measurable difference on taking the greens down," says Brian Hardin, Golf Course Superintendent at The Palms Golf Club in La Quinta, California. "It's got that capability to push the envelope."

The Palms is a demanding, high-end private course whose members tend to be experienced golfers—the men average a 7 handicap. It's also one of only three courses in its desert area with A4 bentgrass greens. "We're known for that. It's our niche here," says Hardin.

"Our caliber of player really likes fast, challenging greens," he adds. "I was sneaking under the 100/1000ths height and wanted something that didn't scalp. With that and our undulations, it can be tricky."

After hearing about the Flex 21, Hardin tried one out.

"I put it on one of my greens with a real gnarly slope, and it took it fine," he says. "I think I had it at 100/1000ths mowing height. Now typically during our season we're at 90/1000ths. It's definitely following the contours better than a stationary unit would. I haven't had any scalp problems."

Hardin says the club's



Don Tolson eliminated the scalping problem at the exclusive Stock Farm Club with the Flex 21 greensmower.

members have noticed the faster greens since he started using Flex 21s.

“They’re happy with the speed, and I’m happy with the way it’s able to cut. Now I can go below 100/1000ths and I don’t have a problem.”

Solution To A Problem

“I think they’re great mowers,” says Don Tolson about his five Flex 21s. “Their cutting quality is excellent, and we’re able to get our height down where it needs to be without scalping.”

Tolson is Superintendent at the Stock Farm Club in Hamilton, Montana, an exclusive private facility featuring an 18-hole championship course designed by Tom Fazio. The course has undulating bentgrass greens, and until Tolson got Flex 21 units, mowing them was much more difficult.

“We have quite a bit of movement in our greens, and we were doing some scalping,” he says. “It was limiting

my height of cut. If I got below about 110/1000ths, I was definitely scalping. So I watched the development of the Flex 21 with great interest.”

Tolson knew the superintendent at a Colorado club where the first Flex 21 units were being tested a few years ago. After hearing lots of positive feedback, Tolson tried the mower himself.

“It solved our scalping problems,” he says. “Now we can cut down to 105/1000ths during the season. We’re also able to take care of the whole green the same way, instead of having to baby any high or low spots that were getting scalped.”

Passing The Tests

“The biggest thing is that it minimizes scalping, and it’s just easier on the green,” says Tim Hiers, Golf Course Manager at The Old Collier Club in Naples, Florida—another private facility with exceptionally high standards. The Fazio-designed course with Seashore Paspalum greens opened in 2001, and the need for a greensmower like the Flex 21 became apparent during the construction phases.

“In 2001, we had a lot of heat and humidity, and our greens were struggling,” explains Hiers. “I heard about the Flex 21, and got a demo. We tried it on

three of our worst greens and we saw a response within three days.”

Convinced by the test, Hiers decided to go with the new units. In addition to being impressed by the machines, he reports that his Toro distributor gave him “phenomenal” support and service.

“Toro couldn’t have been any better,” he says. “Their support was absolutely A++.”

The hot climate and year-round play in Florida are tough on greens. But at Old Collier, the peak golfing season is actually in the fall and winter. Hiers says when course activity intensifies, he’ll use the Flex 21s to mow his greens at about 110/1000ths.

“It just gives a very high quality cut, and it reduces stress,” he says. “If you have greens with a lot of undulation and you want to minimize scalping, this would be a mower you want to look at. I’d say you don’t even have to have a scalping problem to use it.”

Easier To Use

“They’re definitely an improvement for being operator-friendly,” says Tolson. “Everybody likes them. They’re easy to operate with everything right there at your hands. It’s also easier maintenance. The guys in the shop can just pull them off and work on them and then put them back on. They’ve definitely made the equipment manager’s and his staff’s jobs easier.”

The Flex 21 was developed—and continues to be improved—with your satisfaction in mind. By providing lower cuts, less scalping and easy, dependable use, the Flex 21 helps to meet the changing demands of today’s golfers...and helps you keep a better course.

“If you want to go super low and you have undulating greens, and if you have the turf such as A-4 or the other newer varieties of bent, I’d say the Flex is your ticket,” adds Superintendent Hardin. “It definitely will work better than any other mower out there.” ■

Got A Flex 21 Comment or Story?

The unique, problem-solving design of the Flex 21 walking greensmower has generated a lot of conversation, and Toro wants to hear your opinion. Are you mowing lower? Is scalping an issue for you? How can we help?

Please send us your Flex 21 comments or questions by e-mailing toroadvantage@toro.com or faxing 952.887.8693. The more we know about your needs, the better we can address them. Thanks!